

**Remarks as delivered by Adm Mike Mullen
Rear Adm. Iasiello Retirement and Change of Command
Washington, DC
23 June 2006**

Well, good morning everyone. Secretary England, it's particularly great to have you back, even though briefly, Secretary Winter, Secretaries Navas, Admirals Fallon and Yost, General Magnus distinguished guests, friends, families. It is great to see you here today.

Today is a special day. It's not often that we say goodbye to a shipmate who has such an exalted Chain of Command -- his goes straight to the very top.

Lou, thank you for inviting me to be here to share this day with you and your family.

If Lou is nothing else, he is a devoted son and brother. And this is an especially meaningful day for all the members of Lou's family here with us.

Lou told me how important it was to have his mother -- Hazel -- and his "older" sisters Lori and Janis here today.

They're both actually younger than Lou, but its funny how he always forgets that when he's introducing them.

So to Hazel, Lori, Janis and to all Lou's family and friends, again, welcome and in particular Mom, we are appreciative that you raised such a fine son that we could share for these many years in service to our country.

Today is also our chance to welcome another set of old friends -- Robert and Evelyn Burt -- who, while not new to DC -- we recognize today as Bob takes the helm as Chief of Chaplains.

It is great to see his mother, Edna, his daughters Lisa and Leanne, and the rest of his family here. Thanks for coming.

Lou and I go back a long time, and I like the fact that I can call him both Father and friend is a very special relationship.

He's not just a man of God to me, he's a good man.

In fact, as only a friend could do on a day like today, I'd like to start with a little story about Lou.

Some of you may have heard this story before, some of you may even believe it.

You should, because it's one of those rare sea stories that is actually true and it says a lot about him.

And like all great sea stories, it gives us great insight into the kind of man -- the kind of naval officer -- Lou Iasiello is.

Now, everyone who knows Lou, knows he's a real team player, as dedicated and loyal a shipmate as ever there was.

Loyal, as it turns out, to a fault or at least to a misdemeanor.

For Lou here may be the only Navy chaplain in our storied history with a police record in a foreign country.

Seems that once, while in Portugal on liberty with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit he came across a group of Marines in a scuffle with some local citizens and police.

What exactly they were scuffling over is of little importance, and probably just as well lost to history for Lou's sake but he rushed to the scene and waded into the crowd to stop the fighting.

When the police starting making arrests some ran, but not Lou. He stood up for the Marines, assisted the injured -- defused the situation -- and confronted the police.

Speaking to officers in their native tongue, Lou tried to calm the waters and figure out what had gone wrong.

He tried to get the police to reason with him and to release the Marines.

As any good Franciscan would, he also tried to remember the advice of St. Francis to “preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary.”

Well, either his words or his Portuguese proved wholly insufficient, because Lou quickly found himself in jail with his Marines.

He kept on preaching though, lecturing the Commandant of Police on the unnecessarily rough treatment of the Marines, scolding the Marines for letting themselves get into that situation in the first place and basically making everyone even more miserable than they were in the first place.

Regret over the incident -- real regret -- was, after just a few hours, a universal sentiment suffered by both sides.

And, in a fitting tribute to a sometimes gulf in service culture that can still exist between the Navy and Marine Corps, Lou’s Navy bosses back aboard the ship considered putting him under house arrest. No more liberty for you, Lou.

The Marines gave him a medal.

So, what does this story tell us about Lou besides the fact that he speaks bad Portuguese?

It tells us, first and foremost, that he’s is a leader.

He’s not afraid to step out in front to take a chance to find a way.

Lou has led our Chaplain Corps extraordinarily well during this critical time in our nation's history, moving it from a chapel-centric focus to an operational focus, more fitting for this long war on terror we now fight.

He was, like so many of us, immediately touched, scarred and shaped by the events of September 11th. He was among the first of the Chaplains to respond.

Lou, a man of the deepest faith, was not deterred.

As Chaplain of the Marine Corps and then as the Navy's Chief of Chaplains, Lou ably and firmly led remarkable change to prepare the Chaplaincy for the difficulties that lie ahead.

Through a program he called Sea Chaplaincy 21, he transformed the service of our 1,400 Chaplains, 1,200 Religious Program Specialists and 5,000 volunteers, assuring they were ready and in all the right places to support the war.

He put Sailors and service members of all persuasions, those serving in the Field and the Fleet and their families at the center.

He totally revamped training and education, as well as organizations and processes to better enable Religious Ministry Teams to serve and support those in the fight.

And that support is truly extraordinary in every way.

He steadfastly led the Chaplain Corps that has been, and as is now, sharing the dangers and discomforts with the troops in the fight, yet always, providing spiritual and emotional support for those in need, comforting those in mourning, consoling the wounded and the dying, serving the spiritual needs of hundreds of thousands, and doing so in the most ecumenical way.

They are doing terrific things in the toughest of times.

I was in Iraq not long ago, visiting with Sailors and Marines out in the field.

When they're hurt, it's the Doc they call out for, those amazing and heroic Navy Corpsmen of ours.

When they're confused, scared, lonely, when they're near death it's "Where's the Chaplain?"

That is -- and will always be -- Lou's legacy to the nation. A Chaplaincy stronger, more solid in purpose, and more ready than ever.

Now, to be honest, I think Lou's Mom and sisters might tell you that this extraordinary leadership came as a bit of a surprise.

From looking at the photo he keeps in his office of when he was ten years old, proudly wearing his sea cadet Sailor suit, you would think that he was destined from the start to be a Sailor and an Admiral.

But there are those who will tell you he was far from a model cadet, he had his share of ins and outs, they tell me.

Always out of step and frequently in trouble.

Once the nuns at school considered him to be so troublesome that they put him under a table. Seeing that one of the nuns had left a brown bag there, he proceeded to have sister's lunch.

Even at graduation, school officials told Mrs. Iasiello not to bother sending him to college, that he would never amount to more than the class jester.

But as it soon became very clear, that he would rise swiftly to the head of his class.

He stayed there ever since. In graduate school and seminary and even at the Navy Chaplain School, where he was the honor graduate and voted by his peers most likely to succeed.

Pretty fair prediction I'd say.

It was this same force of intellect and wisdom that guided him that day in Portugal.

It didn't keep him out of jail, but he forced others to look deep inside themselves. He forced them to think.

He's been doing so ever since.

A poignant -- and very timely example -- is an article he recently published in the Naval War College Review, an article in which he examines the difficult and seemingly conflicting demands of warfare, the internal struggle between morals and mortal combat.

Lou -- the scholar, the teacher -- encourages us above all to watch and learn from the experience of those who have tasted the bitterness of that combat.

“Warriors benefit from the experience of others,” he writes, “who have been tried and tested in battle, their study of the actions and decisions of others facing the fog of inhumanity of war may help them retain a moral and humane focus.”

And he hasn’t just written about that. He’s been out in the Field and in the Fleet himself, demonstrating it, as have his chaplains and Religious Program Specialists.

He has always remained morally and humanely centered.

And that is perhaps the last thing we see so vividly in the story of his little European vacation.

He is a man who cares, deeply, serenely for others.

For these past twenty-four years, there has been no one better at counseling, comforting and providing an upright example for service members and their families.

From ships at sea to bases ashore, from Newport to Norfolk to San Diego and Alaska and in many other places including a Portuguese jailhouse people have come to know Father Lou as a compassionate man and a caring priest.

Always giving and firmly guiding. Always emphasizing charity and the inclusion of all God's people in his and the Chaplaincy's outreach.

He assured our Fleet Ministry Centers epitomized that outreach. That they remained focused on serving the spiritual needs of every service member and their families.

Lou, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands in uniform and out, on behalf of all those you have so passionately protected and mentored, thank you for always being there with us and by us and for us and with us, regardless of our own failings, offering us loving friendship, a moral compass and the strongest sort of leadership.

Bob, now it's your turn. You must carry that legacy of leadership forward and I know you will continue the momentum and build on these successes. You bring exactly the right experience to this job.

You have been out there with Sailors and Marines and their families -- in combat zones, hospitals, and even in their living rooms.

Just last Easter, as the sun rose on the desert of Western Iraq – when you could have been at home in your living room, you were instead with the troops in Al Asad – praying with them and ministering to them.

Your leadership serves as an example to us all. It gives me great confidence that the Chaplaincy and the spiritual well being of our men and women in uniform, our dedicated civilians, our families, and our military communities -- is in great hands.

Lead well. It is your most important task.

Lou, Deborah and I wish you all the best as you turn this new page. After today, our active ranks will be short one great admiral, but the Washington Theological Union will gain a terrific president.

Thank you again, for your leadership, your counsel, your friendship. Your influence will endure with all of us who you've taught so much.

Fair winds and following seas, shipmate.

And the next part of the ceremony, the Navy put you in for a medal.